

Superior Telegram

Stimulus Dollars Help Weatherize Homes

09/28/2009

Barbara Larson of rural Superior wants to stay in the home where she's lived for nearly four decades.

The cost of heating the small house on a social security income was overwhelming on her budget – \$4,000 last year for the 1,100 gallons of propane needed to heat the small house.

She would keep the heat turned down because she simply couldn't afford it, her daughter-in-law Jenny Larson said.

Things could be different this year, however, with the help of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Larson is due for a makeover to weatherize the home where she's lived since 1970. Hers is just one of the homes in the six-county region served by the weatherization program operated by the Ashland County Housing Authority. The agency has an office at 502 22nd Ave. E., in Superior and serves a six-county area that includes Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Iron Price and Vilas counties in northern Wisconsin.

Denise Lutz, director of the housing authority, estimates the agency will be able to provide energy-saving makeovers to 500 homes through the federal stimulus package.

A typical project, which can cost anywhere from \$500 to \$10,000 can save the homeowner anywhere from 25 percent to 40 percent of their energy costs.

Even at the low end of the savings, that's a good rate of return, Rep. Nick Milroy, D-Superior, said. At 25 percent savings, Larson stands to save about \$1,000 this year.

"It'll help people to save a lot of money on their heating bills," said U.S. Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wausau, who was touring the district Monday to see what impact the federal stimulus package is having on northern Wisconsin. "It'll save us a lot of money that we're shoveling abroad to oil-producing countries and it helps to improve labor conditions."

As the author of the stimulus package as the house appropriations committee, Obey said it's money well spent.

"I can think of a lot of ways that taxpayers' money is spent that are not nearly as rewarding as this," Obey said.

During a "blow test" at Larson's home today, Energy Auditor Bob Bennett said they were able to determine how much air was circulating in and out of the home – it would be the equivalent of having 4,896 balls in one window and out the other every minute.

"That's basically a good, windy day," Bennett said.

And that's a lot of money wasted, Obey said. Instead of paying fuel assistance out that is just being wasted, the weatherization program helps homeowners conserve energy, ensuring that fuel assistance is money well spent.

"We can help people stay in their homes," Obey said.

Larson agrees.

She thanked the congressman for the assistance.

While the program normally has a two-year waiting list before projects are funded, Lutz said, work on Larson's home started today. She applied for the program last winter.

It's going to make a difference, her daughter-in-law said, remembering coming to visit and shivering because Barbara Larson kept the heat low to conserve limited resources because she simply couldn't afford to pay for heat.

For more information about the program, call (715) 392-1686 or (800) 274-8311.

Original article is located [here](#) .